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REFLECTIONS

ON

COLONEL HUMPHREYS'

LIFE OF

GENERAL PUTNAM.*

VOLTAIRE opens the preface to his history of Charles Twelfth, king of Sweden, as follows: 'INCREDULITY, says Aristotle, is the source of all wisdom;' and adds: 'This maxim is exceedingly proper for all who read history, and ancient history in particular. How many absurd stories! How many fables shocking to common sense! What then? *Do not believe a word of them.*'

How applicable the foregoing caution may be to the reader of the essay before us, he must judge. At any rate it is a well known fact, that writers of biography, particularly of military men, are much addicted to exaggerations in relating the exploits of their hero; with a view, it would seem, not only of exalting his fame, but also of rendering their history the more entertaining.

This work of Colonel Humphreys certainly contains relations of chivalrous deeds of valor, and hair-breadth escapes, seldom met with in *modern* history, and which are perhaps without a parallel. It is to be regretted, however, that many statements here made in regard to our revolutionary war have by late writers, conversant with the facts, been shown to be palpable mistakes. These errors, nevertheless, had remained uncontradicted for many years; and from the imposing manner in which the narrative was presented to the public, by a companion in arms of the General, and being, it is believed, the first regular work published in relation to the war, it must have had, it may readily be conceived, a powerful influence on succeeding historians of that event, and which is visible in their productions.

Colonel Humphreys was a poet, and is reported to have been a flippant, gentlemanlike person, of good address, full of vanity, but not distinguished for sound judgment. And the subject of his memoir is well known to have been a rough, uneducated man, and extremely

*'AN Essay on the Life of the Hon. Major-General ISRAEL PUTNAM. Addressed to the State Society of the Cincinnati of Connecticut, and first published by their order. By Colonel DAVID HUMPHREYS. With Notes and Additions.' Boston: 1818. First edition, 1788.

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garrulous and egotistical in advanced age. The former, by his own showing, derived his information mainly from the latter; the work therefore might with propriety be denominated an autobiography, and the Colonel the amanuensis of the General. He was indeed, at one period of the war, his aid, and in that capacity had a fair opportunity to listen to the recital of the General's achievements.

It is not proposed to enter into a general review of this work, but merely to select some of the most striking passages, and to apply such observations as the subjects seem to justify. The author, in his prefatory remarks, observes:

'The numerous errors and falsehoods relative to the birth and achievements of Major-General Putnam, which have at a former period been circulated with assiduity on both sides of the Atlantic, and the uncertainty which appeared to prevail with respect to his *real character*, first produced the resolution of writing this essay on his life, and induced the editor to obtain *materials from that hero himself.* And he seizes with eagerness an opportunity of acknowledging his obligations to Doctor Albigence Waldo, who was so obliging as to commit to writing many anecdotes, *communicated to him by General Putnam* in the course of the present year. A multitude of proofs might be produced to demonstrate that military facts cannot always be accurately known but by the commander-in-chief and his confidential officers.

'Should this essay have any influence in correcting mistakes, or rescuing from oblivion the actions of that distinguished veteran, it will be an ample compensation for the trouble, and excite a consolatory reflection through every vicissitude of life.'

It is passing strange, that the achievements of a Major-General in our revolutionary war, if he performed any worthy of notice, should so soon after its close have sunk into oblivion, and that it required the hero himself to trumpet his own fame. The remarks of the biographer might perhaps apply to a subaltern officer, who may have performed heroic actions not recorded in history, and which justice required should be brought into notice. Military operations intended, may be known only to the commander-in-chief, but when put in execution, become notorious. It is in vain, however, that we search for any notable action of the subject of this memoir, in the revolutionary war. He was nearly sixty years old at its commencement; was evidently placed in a station which nature and his education had not qualified him to fill; and was therefore kept in the *reserve* during nearly the whole period of his service, where no action was expected, and consequently no generalship required. The biographer proceeds:

'Israel Putnam, who, through a *regular gradation* of promotion, became the senior Major-General in the army of the United States, and next in rank to General WASHINGTON, was born at Salem, in the province, now State, of Massachusetts, January 7, 1718. . . . To compensate partially for the deficiency of education, though nothing can remove or counterbalance the inconveniences experienced from it in public life, he derived from his parents the source of innumerable advantages in the stamina of a vigorous constitution. Nature, liberal in bestowing on him bodily strength, hardiness, and activity, was by no means parsimonious in mental endowments.

'In the year 1739, he removed from Salem to Pomfret, an inland fertile town in Connecticut: having here purchased a considerable tract of land, he applied himself successfully to agriculture. The first years on a *new farm* are not, however, exempt from disasters and disappointments, which can only be remedied by stubborn and patient industry. Our farmer, sufficiently occupied in building a house and barn, felling woods, making fences, sowing grain, planting orchards, and taking care of his stock, had to encounter the calamities occasioned by drought in summer, blast in harvest, loss of cattle in winter, and the desolation of his sheep-fold by wolves. In one night he had *seventy* fine sheep and goats killed, beside many lambs and kids wounded. This havoc was committed by a she-wolf, which with her annual whelps had for several years infested the vicinity. The young were commonly destroyed by the vigilance of the hunters, but the old one, on being closely pursued, would generally fly to the western woods, and return the next winter with another litter of whelps.'

This is an awful account of calamities, indeed! The most wonderful part of it is, that a single she-wolf should in one night have killed seventy sheep and goats; and that after having caught a tender lamb, she should suffer it to escape with only a wound. She perhaps

adopted the maxim that it is as well to die for an old sheep as a lamb; or possibly she preferred mutton to lamb: on this point we are left entirely to conjecture. Few goats are raised in New-England, sheep being much more profitable; the bulk, therefore, of Mr. Putnam's loss upon this occasion must have consisted of the latter. Now the average number of sheep kept by old farmers in Connecticut, at the period alluded to, may I believe fairly be set down at between thirty and forty; each family keeping no more than were necessary to furnish a sufficiency of wool for its own consumption. That Mr. Putnam, therefore, who had just commenced clearing new land for the purpose of cultivation, should have possessed such a number of sheep as it appears he did, is truly surprising; for, from the manner the story is told, it would seem that the loss he sustained was a mere thinning of his flock.

As the rencontre of Mr. Putnam with the wolf in question is the first of his heroic acts on record; as it has excited great wonderment both in Europe and America; and as it seems to have laid the foundation of his future fame and fortune, I will transcribe the story entire, as related by Colonel Humphreys:

'This wolf at length became such an intolerable nuisance, that Mr. Putnam entered into a combination with five of his neighbors to hunt alternately until they could destroy her. Two by rotation were to be constantly in pursuit. It was known that having lost the toes from one foot by a steel trap, she made one track shorter than the other. By this vestige the pursuers recognized, in a light snow, the route of this pernicious animal. Having followed her to Connecticut river, and found she had turned back in a direct course toward Pomfret, they immediately returned, and by ten o'clock the next morning the blood-hounds had driven her into a den, about three miles distant from the house of Mr. Putnam. The people soon collected with dogs, guns, straw, fire, and sulphur, to attack the common enemy. With this apparatus several unsuccessful efforts were made to force her from the den. The hounds came back badly wounded, and refused to return. The smoke of blazing straw had no effect; nor did the fumes of burnt brimstone, with which the cavern was filled, compel her to quit the retirement. Wearied with such fruitless attempts, (which had brought the time to ten o'clock at night,) Mr. Putnam tried once more to make his dog enter, but in vain; he proposed to his negro man to go down into the cavern and shoot the wolf: the negro declined the hazardous service. Then it was that the master, angry at the disappointment, and declaring that he was ashamed to have a coward in his family, resolved himself to destroy the ferocious beast, lest she should escape through some unknown fissure of the rock. His neighbors strongly remonstrated against the perilous enterprise: but he, knowing that wild animals were intimidated by fire, and having provided several strips of birch-bark, the only combustible material which he could obtain, that would afford light in this deep and darksome cave, prepared for his descent. Having accordingly divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, and having a long rope fastened round his legs, by which he might be pulled back, at a concerted signal, he entered head foremost, with the blazing torch in his hand.

'The aperture of the den, on the east side of a very high ledge of rocks, is about two feet square; from thence it descends obliquely fifteen feet, then running horizontally about ten more, it ascends gradually sixteen feet toward its termination. The sides of this subterraneous cavity are composed of smooth and solid rocks, which seem to have been divided from each other by some former earthquake. The top and bottom are also of stone, and the entrance, in winter, being covered with ice, is exceedingly slippery. It is in no place high enough for a man to raise himself upright, nor in any part more than three feet in width.

'Having groped his passage to the horizontal part of the den, the most terrifying darkness appeared in front of the dim circle of light afforded by his torch. It was silent as the house of death. None but monsters of the desert had ever before explored this solitary mansion of horror. He, cautiously proceeding onward, came to the ascent; which he slowly mounted on his hands and knees until he discovered the glaring eye-balls of the wolf, who was sitting at the extremity of the cavern. Started at the sight of fire, she gnashed her teeth and gave a sullen growl. As soon as he had made the necessary discovery, he kicked the rope as a signal for pulling him out. The people, at the mouth of the den, who had listened with painful anxiety, hearing the growling of the wolf, and supposing their friend to be in the most imminent danger, drew him forth with such celerity that his shirt was stripped over his head and his skin severely lacerated. After he had adjusted his clothes, and loaded his gun with nine buck-shot, holding a torch in one hand and the musket in the other, he descended the second time. When he drew nearer than before, the wolf, assuming a still more fierce and terrible appearance, howling, rolling her eyes, snapping her teeth, and dropping her head between her legs, was evidently in the attitude, and on the point of springing at him. At the critical instant he levelled and fired at her head. Stunned with the shock, and suffocated with the smoke, he immediately found himself drawn out of the cave: but having refreshed himself, and permitted the smoke to dissipate, he went down the third time. Once more he came within sight of the wolf, who appearing very passive, he applied the torch to her nose, and perceiving her dead, he took hold of her ears, and then kicking the rope (still tied round his legs) the people above, with no small exultation, dragged them both out together.

'I have offered these facts in greater detail, because they contain a display of character; and

because they have been erroneously related in several European publications, and very much mutilated in the history of Connecticut, a work as replete with falsehood as destitute of genius, lately printed in London.' — p. 20.

The history here alluded to was written by the Rev. Mr. Peters, a tory refugee, who fled from Connecticut to England on the breaking out of the war of independence. The work was quite in the Munchausen style, and intended to ridicule the people among whom he had officiated as a gospel minister. I have not the book before me, but I recollect one of his anecdotes stated that a company of bull-frogs removing in the night from a pond nearly dried up, in quest of one better supplied with water, and passing near a village, keeping up their usual croaking, so frightened the inhabitants that many sought security by flight. They were taken, says the author, for a body of English soldiers. This queer writer found the foregoing wolf-story ready manufactured to his hand, and deeming it appropriate to his purpose, he incorporated it in his book, with perhaps a little 'extra trimmings.'

The relation of such an extraordinary feat would naturally be seized upon by an author like Mr. Peters, with the view of turning it into ridicule. And in fact there are strong objections to its credibility. The difficulty of drawing a man out, feet-foremost, from such a winding cavern, seems insurmountable. The mention of blood-hounds, in a country where, it is believed, no such species of dog ever existed, is also liable to criticism. Beside, a gentleman who has visited the place assures me that the chasm in the rock is by no means extensive, and that the representation of it here given is entirely groundless. An affair like this, to establish its title to belief, required a *procès-verbal*, signed by the witnesses present, under oath.

After the enumeration of the foregoing grievances, the writer observes:

'Prosperity at length began to attend the agricultural affairs of Mr. Putnam. He was acknowledged to be a skilful and indefatigable manager.' . . . 'But the time had now arrived which was to turn the instruments of husbandry into weapons of hostility, and to exchange the hunting of wolves that had ravaged the sheep-folds, for the pursuit after savages, who had desolated the frontiers. Putnam was about thirty-seven years old, when the war between England and France broke out in America. His reputation must have been favorably known to the government, since among the first troops that were levied by Connecticut, in 1755, he was appointed to the command of a company in Lyman's regiment of Provincials.'

It was no doubt urged that a man who had exhibited such undaunted courage, as above reported, in a rencontre with a wild beast, would be a proper person to contend with a savage foe. The author having got his hero into the army, where he had an opportunity to display his adventurous propensities, details his wonderful achievements in a manner which, however pleasing in romance, is offensive to history, as requiring too severe a tax on human credulity: that is, although possible to have taken place, yet carrying such an air of romance as to lessen, if not totally to destroy, their credibility. Whether this arises from the poetic turn of the reporter, or from the exaggerated accounts given him by the actor himself in the surprising events narrated, I will not pretend to decide. I will transcribe a few of them. The first that occurs, was on an occasion of Captain Rogers and Captain Putnam being detached with a party of light troops for the purpose of obtaining accurate knowledge of the position and state of the works at Crown-Point.

'It was impracticable to approach with their party near enough for this purpose, without being discovered. Alone, the undertaking was sufficiently hazardous, on account of the swarms of hostile Indians who infested the woods. Our two partizans, however, left all their men at a convenient distance, with strict orders to continue concealed until their return. Having thus cautiously taken their arrangements, they advanced with the profoundest silence in the evening; and lay, during the night, contiguous to the fortress. Early in the morning they approached so close as to be able to give satisfactory information to the General who had sent them, on the points to which their attention had been directed: but Captain Rogers being at a little distance from Putnam, fortuitously met a stout Frenchman, who instantly seized his fuzee with one hand, and with the other attempted to stab him, while he called to an adjacent guard for assistance. The guard answered. Putnam perceiving the imminent danger of his friend, and that no time was to be lost, or farther alarm given by firing, ran rapidly to them, while they were yet struggling, and with the butt-end of his piece laid the Frenchman dead at his feet. The partizans, to elude pursuit, precipitated their flight, joined the party, and returned without loss to the encampment.'—p. 26.

'Few are so ignorant of war as not to know that military adventures in the night are always extremely liable to accidents. Captain Putnam, having been commanded to reconnoitre the enemy's camp at *the Ovens* near *Ticonderoga*, took the brave Lieutenant Robert Durkee as his companion. In attempting to execute these orders, he narrowly missed being taken himself in the first instance, and killing his friend in the second. It was customary for the British and Provincial troops to place their fires round their camp, which frequently exposed them to the enemy's scouts and patroles. A contrary practice, then unknown in the English army, prevailed among the French and Indians. The plan was much more rational; they kept their fires in the centre, lodged their men circularly at a distance, and posted their centinels in the surrounding darkness. Our partizans approached the camp, and supposing the centries were within the circle of fires, crept upon their hands and knees with the greatest possible caution, until to their utter astonishment, they found themselves in the thickest of the enemy. The centinels, discovering them, fired and slightly wounded Durkee in the thigh. He and Putnam had no alternative. They fled. The latter, being foremost, and scarcely able to see his hand before him, soon plunged into a clay-pit. Durkee, almost at the identical moment, came tumbling after. Putnam, by no means pleased at finding a companion, and believing him to be one of the enemy, lifted his tomahawk to give the deadly blow, when Durkee, (who had followed so closely as to know him) inquired whether he had escaped unhurt. Captain Putnam instantly recognizing the voice, dropped his weapon; and both, springing from the pit, made good their retreat to the neighboring ledges, amidst a shower of random shot. There they betook themselves to a large log, by the side of which they lodged the remainder of the night. Before they lay down, Captain Putnam said he had a little rum in his canteen, which could never be more acceptable or necessary; but on examining the canteen, which hung under his arm, he found the enemy had pierced it with their balls, and that there was not a drop of liquor left. The next day he found fourteen bullet-holes in his blanket'—p. 28.

It appears that the Captain and Lieutenant started together, and, in the manner of Jack and Gill, almost at the identical moment tumbled into a pit: and is it possible that the brave Captain Putnam, under these circumstances, was so frightened as to take his companion for an enemy? His canteen was pierced with balls; one would have sufficed to discharge its contents. He found his blanket had *fourteen bullet-holes*. Here it is evidently intended to intimate that this had been caused by fourteen separate balls. But the blanket must of course have been rolled up and slung on his back; one ball, therefore, might have committed all the damage sustained. This explanation, however, would lessen the imminent danger in which the Captain wished to represent himself upon this occasion.

Captain Putnam was promoted to a Majority by the legislature of Connecticut, in 1757.

'As one day Major Putnam chanced to lie with a batteau and five men on the eastern shore of the Hudson, near the Rapids, contiguous to which Fort Miller stood, his men on the opposite bank had given him to understand that a large body of savages were in his rear, and would be upon him in a moment. To stay and be sacrificed, to attempt crossing and be shot, or to go down to the falls, with an almost absolute certainty of being drowned, were the sole alternatives that presented themselves to his choice. So instantaneously was the latter adopted, that one man who had rambled a little from the party, was, of necessity, left, and fell a miserable victim to savage barbarity. The Indians arrived on the shore soon enough to fire many balls on the batteau before it could be got under way. No sooner had our batteau-men escaped, by favor of the rapidity of the current, beyond the reach of musket-shot, than death seemed only to have been avoided in one form to be encountered in another not less terrible. Prominent rocks, latent shelves, absorbing eddies, and abrupt descents, for a quarter of a mile, afforded scarcely the smallest chance of escaping without a miracle. Putnam, trusting himself to a good providence, whose kindness he had often experienced, rather than to men, whose tenderest mercies are cruelty, was now seen to place himself sedately at the helm, and afford an astonishing spectacle of serenity. His companions, with a mixture of terror, admiration and wonder, saw him incessantly changing the course, to avoid the jaws of ruin, that seemed expanded to swallow the whirling boat. Twice he turned it fairly round to shun the rifts of rocks. Amidst these eddies, in which there was the greatest danger of its foundering, at one moment the sides were exposed to the fury of the waves; then the stern, and next the bow glanced obliquely onward, with inconceivable velocity. With not less amazement the savages beheld him sometimes mounting the billows, then

plunging abruptly down, at other times skilfully veering from the rocks, and shooting through the only narrow passage; until at last they viewed the boat safely gliding on the smooth surface of the stream below. At this sight, it is asserted that these rude sons of nature were affected with the same kind of superstitious veneration which the Europeans in the dark ages entertained for some of their most valorous champions. They deemed the man invulnerable, whom their balls on his pushing from shore could not touch; and whom they had seen steering in safety down the rapids that had never before been passed. They conceived it would be an affront against the *Great Spirit* to attempt to kill this favored mortal with powder and ball, if they should ever see and know him again.' — p. 54.

The author was a graduate of Yale College, and being a poet by profession, had doubtless thoroughly studied Homer and Virgil; and he has evidently endeavored to imitate their graphic powers of delineation; and it must be confessed has succeeded to admiration. But he should have recollected that in this case he was writing prose, and not poetry — history, not fiction; and he should have curbed the ardor of his muse, and confined himself to sober matter-of-fact narrative.

As to the 'superstitious veneration' in which this hero is here said to have been held by the aborigines of this country, '*do not believe a word of it.*' Be assured they at this time were not so readily imposed upon: they had seen, fought, and killed too many white men, to entertain such an exalted opinion of any of them. As they are good marksmen, the Major must have been far enough out of the reach of their musketry when they fired at him; although from the perturbed state in which he was, he may have supposed himself providentially preserved. All the time wanted to start a batteau is that which is required for the men to seize and ply the oars; it is then immediately under way. This, it appears, Major Putnam ordered done, the moment he was informed there was a body of Indians in the vicinity, leaving, perhaps without necessity, one poor fellow to be sacrificed.

The Indians at any rate soon found that Putnam, if invulnerable, was not invincible, for in a rencontre he had with them a little after this affair, he was obliged to surrender himself a prisoner:

'Major Putnam had discharged his fuzee several times, but at length it missed fire, while the muzzle was pressed against the breast of a *large and well-proportioned savage.* The warrior, availing himself of the indefensible attitude of his adversary, with a tremendous war-whoop, sprang forward, with his lifted hatchet, and compelled him to surrender; and having disarmed and bound him fast to a tree, returned to the battle.' A change of position of the combatants 'occasioned the tree to which Putnam was tied to be directly between the fire of the two parties. Human imagination can hardly figure to itself a more deplorable situation. The balls flew incessantly from each side, many struck the tree, while some passed through the sleeves and skirts of his coat. In this state of jeopardy, unable to move his body, to stir his limbs, or even to incline his head, he remained more than an hour. So equally balanced, and so obstinate was the fight! At one moment, while the battle swerved in favor of the enemy, a young savage chose an odd way of discovering his humor. He found Putnam bound. He might have despatched him at a blow. But he loved better to excite the terrors of the prisoner, by hurling a tomahawk at his head, or rather it should seem his object was to see how near he could throw it without touching him: the weapon struck in the tree a number of times at a hair's breadth distance from the mark.'

The Indians finally drew off, taking Major Putnam with them; and when they had encamped for the night, 'it was determined to roast him alive!' An awful account of the preparations made for the purpose, is given by the biographer. He was however saved by the interference of a French officer, and taken to Montreal. Here he met with Colonel Peter Schuyler, also a prisoner, but on parole, who generously furnished him with clothing and money; and not long after procured him to be exchanged with himself.

To form the character of a complete hero, it is imperious that he

perform some signal acts of gallantry toward the fair; and an opportunity now occurred for the Major to distinguish himself in this respect, which he did in true Quixotic style:

'At the house of Colonel Schuyler, Major Putnam became acquainted with Mrs. Howe, a fair captive, whose history would not be read without emotion, if it could be written in the same affecting manner in which I have often heard it told. She was still young and handsome herself, though she had two daughters of marriageable age. Distress, which had taken somewhat from the original redundancy of her bloom, and added a softening paleness to her cheeks, rendered her appearance the more engaging. Her face, that seemed to have been formed for the assemblage of dimples and smiles, was clouded with care. The natural sweetness was not, however, soured by despondency and petulance, but chastened by humility and resignation. This mild daughter of sorrow looked as if she had known the day of prosperity, when serenity and gladness of soul were the inmates of her bosom. That day was past, and the once lively features now assumed a tender melancholy, which witnessed her irreparable loss. She needed not the customary weeds of mourning, or the fallacious pageantry of wo, to prove her widowed state. She was in that stage of affliction when the excess is so far abated as to permit the subject to be drawn into conversation, without opening the wound afresh. It is then rather a source of pleasure than pain to dwell upon the circumstances in narration. Every thing conspired to make her story interesting. Her first husband had been killed and scalped by the Indians some years before. By an unexpected assault, in 1756, upon Fort Dummer, where she then happened to be present with Mr. Howe, her second husband, the savages carried the fort, murdered the greater part of the garrison, mangled in death her husband, and led her away with seven children into captivity.'

But it appears, that 'a young French officer' had conceived a violent passion for her. 'He pursued her wheresoever she went, and although he could make no advances in her affections, he seemed resolved by perseverance to carry his point. Mrs. Howe, terrified by his treatment, was obliged to keep constantly near Major Putnam, who informed the young officer that he would protect that lady at the risk of his life.' It is added in a note, that 'two or three incidents respecting Mrs. Howe, which were received by the author from General Putnam, and inserted in the former editions, are omitted in this, as they appeared, on farther information, to be mistakes.' Who discovered these mistakes? General Putnam or Colonel Humphreys? The probability is, that the incredibility of some of the reports had been suggested to the latter, which induced him to suppress them. But if they were corrected by the General himself, the circumstance showed his liability to error, which ought to have cautioned the biographer against continuing many of the extravagant relations in the foregoing detail.

'Colonel Putnam, (Putnam had been raised to this rank previous to the close of the war,) at the expiration of ten years from his first receiving a commission, after having seen as much service, endured as many hardships, encountered as many dangers, and acquired as many laurels as any officer of his rank, with great satisfaction laid aside his uniform, and returned to his plough.'

Hostilities between Great Britain and her American colonies commenced on the 18th of April, 1775, at Lexington, Massachusetts:

'Putnam, who was ploughing when he heard the news, left his plough in the middle of the field, unyoked his team, and without waiting to change his clothes, set off for the theatre of action. But finding the British retreated to Boston, and invested by a sufficient force to watch their movements, he came back to Connecticut, levied a regiment, under authority of the legislature, and speedily returned to Cambridge. He was now promoted to be a Major-General on the Provincial staff, by his colony; and, in a little time, confirmed by Congress, in the same rank on the Continental establishment. General Ward of Massachusetts, by common consent, commanded the whole; and the celebrated Doctor Warren was made a Major-General.

'Not long after this period, the British commander-in-chief found the means to convey a proposal privately to General Putnam, that if he would relinquish the rebel party, he might rely upon being made a Major-General on the British establishment, and receiving a great pecuniary compensation for his services. General Putnam spurned at the offer; which however *he thought prudent at that time to conceal from public notice.*'

Mr. Sweet, in his 'Sketch of Bunker-Hill Battle,' says: 'On the first news of the battle of Lexington, Putnam mounted his horse, rode in a single day one hundred miles, arrived at Cambridge, and attended

a council of war on the 21st of April.' He must have been full of fight, or have supposed his presence at the scene of action very essential to the country. Mr. Sweet, I find, obtained his information from the same source as Colonel Humphreys — at second hand from the family of General Putnam. Is it possible that Colonel Putnam would not pay the general officers and other gentlemen he was going to meet in council so much respect as to put on his military, or at least his Sunday coat, which every Connecticut farmer is always supplied with? Respect for himself, it would be thought, would have induced him to have done this. I am therefore inclined to believe this to be a *mistake*. I suspect also that the General was hoaxed in regard to his being offered a bribe by General Gage. For, however well qualified he might formerly have been, as a partisan officer, his age at this time in some measure, but more particularly his want of education, and rough manners, rendered him unfit to fulfil the duties of Major-General.

The ridiculous story, however, respecting the intercourse said to have taken place between Gage and Putnam, appears, according to the editor, to have been fabricated in England. He says:

'An article, void of foundation, mentioning an interview between General Gage and General Putnam, appeared in the English gazettes in these words: 'General Gage, viewing the American army with his telescope, saw General Putnam in it, which surprised him; and he contrived to get a message delivered to him, that he wanted to speak to him. Putnam without any hesitation waited upon him. General Gage showed him his fortifications, and advised him to lay down his arms. General Putnam replied, he could force his fortifications in half an hour, and advised General Gage to go on board the ships with his troops.'

Colonel Humphreys, in speaking of the battle of Bunker-Hill, says: 'In this battle, the presence and example of General Putnam, who arrived with the reinforcement, were not less conspicuous than useful. He did every thing that an intrepid and experienced officer could accomplish. The enemy pursued to Winter-Hill; Putnam made a stand, and drove them back under cover of their ships.' The editor says: 'Such was the statement made in some American newspapers of that day, but without any foundation in fact. There was no pursuit of the British beyond Bunker-Hill.' Had the aid-de-camp of General Putnam need to apply to vague newspaper reports for correct information of this battle? How often did the General reiterate to him his achievements on the memorable day of that contest! At any rate, this biography was published some years before the decease of the subject of it, who might have had any mistakes he thought proper corrected; but it seems he chose to pocket the affront of the misstatements. The author has also committed another error in his account of this affair. He says, the troops sent on this service were 'under the orders of General Warren.' Whereas Warren acted as a volunteer, and refused the command of the redoubt offered to him by Colonel Prescott, but fought valiantly with his musket.

But I shall show, in the sequel, that General Putnam is justly entitled to no laurels for his conduct on this occasion; that he was an inactive spectator, in a secure position, during the whole time of the engagement; that he appeared only in the retreat, carrying off, it is said, some camp equipage upon his horse. Indeed the above statement in respect to him amounts to nothing, except that part of it which

found to be erroneous. 'He did every thing,' etc., but no specification is given, because there was no tangible act to admit of it:

'In the beginning of July, General WASHINGTON, who had been constituted by Congress Commander-in-Chief of the American forces, arrived at Cambridge to take the command. Having formed the army into three grand divisions, consisting of about twelve regiments each, he appointed Major-General Ward to command the right wing, Major-General Lee the left wing, and Major-General Putnam the reserve. General Putnam's alertness in accelerating the construction of the necessary defences was particularly noticed and highly approved by the Commander-in-Chief.'

On the foregoing the editor remarks, in a note: 'It was not in Putnam's nature to be idle: inured to habits of industry himself, no man was better calculated to make others so; and WASHINGTON, observing the great progress that had been made in a short time, and with but few men, in raising a work of defence, said to him: 'You seem to have the faculty, General Putnam, of infusing your own industrious spirit into all the workmen you employ.''

General WASHINGTON saw at once what sort of employment General Putnam was calculated for; and he was accordingly engaged in superintending the erection of fortifications, or placed in reserve in the interior, for the most part, during the time he remained in service, which was till December, 1779; when ill health caused him to retire.

'In order to cover the country adjoining to the Sound, and to support the garrison of West Point, in case of an attack, Major-General Putnam was stationed for the winter of 1778–9, at Reading, in Connecticut. He had under his orders the brigade of New-Hampshire, the two brigades of Connecticut, the corps of infantry commanded by Hazen, and that of cavalry by Sheldon.

'The troops, who had been badly fed, badly clothed, and worse paid, by brooding over their grievances in the leisure and inactivity of winter quarters, began to think them intolerable. The Connecticut brigades formed the design of marching to Hartford, where the General Assembly was then in session, and of demanding redress at the point of the bayonet. Word having been brought to General Putnam, that the second brigade was under arms for this purpose, he mounted his horse, galloped to the cantonment, and thus addressed them: 'My brave lads, whither are you going? Do you intend to desert your officers, and to invite the enemy to follow you into the country? Whose cause have you been fighting and suffering so long in? Is it not your own? Have you no property, no parents, wives or children? You have behaved like men so far; all the world is full of your praises; and posterity will stand astonished at your deeds; but not if you spoil all at last. Don't you consider how much the country is distressed by the war, and that your officers have not been any better paid than yourselves? But we all expect better times, and that the country will do us ample justice. Let us all stand by one another, then, and fight it out like brave soldiers. Think what a shame it would be for Connecticut men to run away from their officers.' After the several regiments had received the General as he rode along the line with drums beating, and presented arms, the sergeants who had then the command, brought the men to an order, in which position they continued while he was speaking. When he had done, he directed the acting Major of Brigade to give the word for them to shoulder, march to their regimental parades, and lodge arms; all which they executed with promptitude and apparent good humor. One soldier only, who had been the most active, was confined in the quarter-guard; from whence, at night, he attempted to make his escape. But the sentinel, who had also been in the mutiny, shot him dead on the spot, and thus the affair subsided.

'About the middle of winter, while General Putnam was on a visit to his out-post at Horse-Neck, he found Governor Tryon advancing upon that town with a corps of fifteen hundred men. To oppose these General Putnam had only a picquet of one hundred and fifty men, and two iron field-pieces, without horses or drag-ropes. He, however, planted his cannon on the high ground, by the meeting-house, and retarded their approach by firing several times, until, perceiving the horse (supported by the infantry) about to charge, he ordered the picquet to provide for their safety, by retiring to a swamp inaccessible to horse, and secured his own, by plunging down the steep precipice at the church upon a full trot. This precipice is so steep, where he descended, as to have artificial stairs, composed of nearly one hundred stone steps, for the accommodation of foot passengers. There the dragoons, who were but *a sword's length* from him, stopped short; for the declivity was so abrupt, that they ventured not to follow; and, before they could gain the valley, by going round the brow of the hill in the ordinary road, he was far enough beyond their reach.'

I am induced to believe that General Putnam here, as in the case of Lieutenant Durkee's following him into the clay-pit, labored under a false apprehension. I have descended this famous hill, at the place where Putnam is said to have bolted from the main road, leading my horse. The dragoons surely would not hesitate to have done the same, to secure the old General; who, I am confident, could not have gained much, if any, by being on horseback. The road is of course

made winding, for the purpose of rendering the ascent more gradual, and consequently an object a short distance ahead would be out of sight of persons in the rear; which was, no doubt, the case with Putnam when he made his escape, as above related.

Colonel Humphreys' life of Putnam was first published in 1788. The General had been attacked with paralysis, in December, 1779, which deprived him of the use of his limbs on the right side. 'In that situation,' says his biographer, 'he has constantly remained, favored with such a portion of bodily activity as enables him to walk and ride moderately; and retaining unimpaired his relish for enjoyment, his love of pleasantry, his strength of memory, and all the faculties of his mind. As a proof that his powers of memory are not weakened, it ought to be observed, that he has lately repeated from recollection all the adventures of his life, which are here recorded, and which had formerly been communicated to the compiler in detached conversations.' In the edition of the work which I use, published in 1818, it is added, that General Putnam was attacked with an inflammatory disease on the 17th of May, 1790, and died on the 19th of the same month.

General Putnam, it appears, was of a convivial disposition; and wishing to amuse his neighbors on winter evenings, was doubtless in the habit of detailing his adventures, and occasionally ornamenting them with a spice of the wonderful, to render them more acceptable and entertaining to his company; till by frequent repetition these addenda escaped the notice even of the narrator himself. There is no other way of accounting for his not contradicting many of the absurdities and errors contained in this memoir, which he must frequently have read.

It is unfortunate for the truth of history, that this publication ever appeared, as it has had great influence with succeeding historians, sanctioned as it was by the Connecticut Society of Cincinnati, composed of revolutionary general and field officers. It is probable, however, that none of the members of this society read the manuscripts; and if they had, although they had heard of the wolf affair, and of the miraculous escape of the General, at Horseneck Hill, they must have been utterly ignorant of his exploits with the Indians in the French war, as these were known to no living soul but himself.

If the characters of our revolutionary officers of the highest grade can be sustained only by incredible Munchausen stories, the sooner they fall into oblivion the better for the honor of the country.

I will take a brief notice of a 'Sketch of the Battle of Bunker Hill, by S. Sweet;' published in 1818, and here appended to the work of Colonel Humphreys. The author says:

'With the advice of the council of war, General Ward issued orders to Colonel William Prescott, to the commander of Colonel Frye's regiment, and Colonel Bridge, to be prepared for an expedition, with all their men fit for service, and one day's provisions. The same order issued for one hundred and twenty of General Putnam's regiment, and one company of artillery with two field pieces.

'With these troops Colonel Prescott was ordered to proceed to Charlestown, *in the evening*, take possession of Bunker Hill, and erect the requisite fortifications to defend it.'—p. 208.

'General Putnam having the general superintendence of the expedition, and the chief, Colonel Gridley, accompanied the troops.'—p. 210.

'At *daybreak*, General Putnam ordered Lieutenant Clark to send and request of General Ward a horse for him to ride to Bunker Hill. The Lieutenant went himself, but the General's impatience could not await an answer. On his return he found him mounted and departing.'—p. 117.

These two contradictory accounts are doubtless derived from the same source; the narrator through lack of memory forgetting, when relating one story, that he had told a different one respecting the same transactions upon another occasion. That Mr. Sweet communicated with the family of General Putnam, and received his information from it, he expressly states.

Our author says: 'The drums beat to arms. Putnam left his works, commenced on Bunker Hill, and led his troops into action.' — p. 227. It will hereafter appear that this statement is a *mistake;* that he commenced no works on Bunker Hill; that he calculated on the defeat of the Americans, and made no effort to prevent it. His whole care seems to have been bestowed on saving the entrenching tools. His opinion of the issue of the combat, at the time, is thus related by Mr. Sweet: 'As General Warren passed on to the scene of action, he met with General Putnam, who observed, that 'From long experience, he perfectly comprehended the character of the British army; they would ultimately succeed and drive us from the works, but from the mode of attack they had chosen, it was in our power to do them infinite mischief, though we must be prepared for a brave and orderly retreat, when we could maintain our ground no longer.' — p. 220.

This must have been a private conversation, if it ever occurred, between these two generals; for certainly General Putnam would not have been so imprudent as to advance such an opinion publicly. The relation of it, therefore, must be derived from him; but whether the opinion were expressed before or after the fact, may be doubtful. At any rate, his want of faith in the success of the American arms upon this occasion is apparent; and this seems to have paralyzed his exertions toward its accomplishment. He remained on horseback at a distance from the battle-ground, prepared for a speedy retreat whenever his own safety might require it. Notwithstanding these forebodings of Putnam, Mr. Sweet says, 'The Americans were impatient to be led against the enemy. General Putnam, Colonel Prescott, and other veterans, demanded that advantage should be taken of this disposition of the men, and their wishes gratified.' What glaring inconsistency! '*Do not believe a word of it.*' This is an instance of poetical history; trimmings are required to make a complete hero. Putnam is here made to advise an action which he was convinced would end in defeat!

A pamphlet of thirty-six pages, published at Portland in 1835, has fallen into my hands, which puts an end to all farther doubt respecting the conduct of General Putnam on the occasion in question. It is entitled, 'History of the Battle of Breed's Hill: by Major-Generals William Heath, Henry Lee, James Wilkinson, and Henry Dearborn. Compiled by Charles Coffin.'

Mr. Coffin has added the testimony of other very respectable witnesses, who were engaged in the action, and is deserving of great praise for the trouble he has taken in placing the history of the important event treated of, on its true basis, and beyond the reach of cavil. He has prefaced the pamphlet with the following notice:

'Having for years been satisfied that the accounts of Breed's Hill Battle, as given by Gordon, Warren, Ramsey, and Marshall, are defective and imperfect, I have been induced to publish the transaction of that memorable event, as given by four American Major-Generals, who were either in the

action, or had the best possible opportunities of being fully acquainted with the details of it, and who from their profession were better qualified to give a full and fair narrative, than any others who have undertaken it; to which are added, the deposition of a number of highly respectable gentlemen who were eye witnesses and partakers of the glory of that proud day. The following sheets, it is believed, will give a more full and accurate view of the troops engaged, by whom commanded, and all the transactions of the day, than any narrative extant. My objects are truth and justice to the living and the dead.'

I shall select a few passages only from this pamphlet, respecting the immediate matter at issue, without regard to the details connected therewith, which are not essential to my purpose.

Battle of Breed's Hill. — The following is from the 'Memoirs of Major-General William Heath, published in 1798.'

'Perhaps there never was a better fought battle than this, all things considered; and too much praise can never be bestowed on the conduct of Colonel William Prescott, who, notwithstanding any thing that may have been said, *was the proper commanding officer* at the redoubt, and nobly acted his part as such, during the whole action.

'Just before the action began, General Putnam came to the redoubt, and told Colonel Prescott that the entrenching tools must be sent off, or they would be lost; the Colonel replied, that if he sent any of the men away with the tools, not one of them would return; to this the General answered, 'They shall every man return.' A large party was then sent off with the tools, and not one of them returned: in this instance the Colonel was the best judge of human nature. In the time of action, Colonel Prescott observed that the brave General Warren was near the works; he immediately stepped up to him, and asked him if he had any orders to give him. The General replied that he had none, that he exercised no command there: 'The command,' said the General, 'is yours.'

Our next extract is from Major-General Henry Lee's 'Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department,' published in 1812. General Lee merely glances at the battle of Bunker Hill. He says:

'Warren, who fell nobly supporting the action, was the favorite of the day, and has engrossed the fame due to Prescott. No man reveres the character of Warren more than the writer; and he considers himself not only, by his obedience to truth, doing justice to Colonel Prescott, but performing an acceptable service to the memory of the illustrious Warren, who being a really great man, would disdain to wear laurels not his own. . . . The military annals of the world rarely furnish an achievement which equals the firmness and courage displayed on that proud day by the gallant band of Americans; and it certainly stands first in the brilliant events of our war. When future generations shall inquire where are the men who gained the highest prize of glory in the arduous contest which ushered in our nation's birth, upon Prescott and his companions in arms will the eye of history beam.'

From 'A Sketch of the Battle of Breed's Hill, by Major-General James Wilkinson,' published in 1816, we take the following:

'If General Putnam had moved up with Colonel Gerrish and the men who remained stationary within six hundred yards of the combat, which lasted an hour and a half, the triumph of the provincials would have been decisive, and those of the British corps who were not killed must have surrendered, which would probably have terminated the contest, and prevented the disseverment of the British empire; but I understand from high authority, that it was in vain Colonel Prescott sent messenger after messenger to entreat General Putnam to come to his succor; he rode about Bunker's Hill, while the battle raged under his eye, with a number of entrenching tools slung across his horse, but did not advance a step, and was passed, with Colonel Gerrish at his side, by Stark and Dearborn, as they retreated, near the spot where they saw him when they advanced; and for this conduct Colonel Prescott never ceased to condemn the General.' . . . 'All the reinforcements which arrived at Bunker Hill, after Colonel Stark had passed, halted and kept company with General Putnam and Colonel Gerrish.'

Account of the Battle, by Major-General Henry Dearborn, published in 1818:

'When the troops arrived at the summit of Bunker's Hill, we found General Putnam with nearly as many men as had been engaged in the battle; notwithstanding which, no measure had been taken for reinforcing us, nor was there a shot fired over our retreat, or any movement made to check the advance of the enemy to this height; but on the contrary, General Putnam rode off with a number of *spades and pick-axes in his hands*, and the troops that had remained with him *inactive* during the whole of the action, although within a few hundred yards of the battle-ground, and no obstacle to impede their movement but musket balls.'

'The total loss of the British was about twelve hundred, upward of five hundred killed and between six and seven hundred wounded. The Welsh fusileers suffered most severely; they came into action five hundred strong, and all were killed or wounded but eighty-three.

'I will mention an extraordinary circumstance to show how far the temporary reputation of a man may affect the minds of all classes of society.

'General Putnam had entered our army at the commencement of the revolutionary war, with such a universal popularity as can scarcely now be conceived, even by those who then felt the whole force of it, and no one can at this time offer any satisfactory reasons why he was held in such high estimation.

'In the battle of Bunker's Hill he took post on the declivity toward Charlestown neck; where I saw him on horseback as we passed on to Breed's Hill, with Colonel Gerrish by his side. I heard the gallant Colonel Prescott (who commanded in the redoubt) observe after the war, at the table of his Excellency, James Boudoin, then Governor of this Commonwealth, 'that he sent three messengers during the battle to General Putnam, requesting him to come forward and take the command, there being no general officer present, and the relative rank of the Colonel not having been settled; but that he received no answer, and his whole conduct was such, both during the action and the retreat, that he ought to have been shot.' He remained at or near the top of Bunker Hill until the retreat with Colonel Gerrish by his side; I saw them together when we retreated. He not only continued at that distance himself during the whole of the action, but had a force with him nearly as large as that engaged. No reinforcement of men or ammunition was sent to our assistance; and, instead of attempting to cover the retreat of those who had expended their last shot in the face of the enemy, he retreated in company with Colonel Gerrish, and his whole force, without discharging a single musket; but what is still more astonishing, Colonel Gerrish was arrested for cowardice, tried, cashiered, and universally execrated; while not a word was said against the conduct of General Putnam, whose extraordinary popularity alone saved him, not only from trial, but even from censure. Colonel Gerrish commanded a regiment, and should have been at its head. His regiment was not in action although ordered; but as he was in the suite of the General, and appeared to be in the situation of Adjutant General, why was he not directed by Putnam to join it, or the regiment sent into action under the senior officer present with it?

'When General Putnam's ephemeral and unaccountable popularity subsided or faded away, and the minds of the people were released from the shackles of a delusive trance, the circumstances relating to Bunker-Hill were viewed and talked of in a very different light, and the selection of the unfortunate Colonel Gerrish as a scape-goat considered as a mysterious and inexplicable event.

'I have no private feeling to gratify by making this statement in relation to General Putnam, as I never had any intercourse with him, and was only in the army where he was present, for a few months; but at this late period, I conceive it a duty to give a fair and impartial account of one of the most important battles during the war of independence, and all the circumstances connected with it, so far as I had the means of being correctly informed. It is a duty I owe to posterity, and the character of those brave officers who bore a share in the hardships of the revolution.'

I will take a short notice of the other interesting and satisfactory documents adduced by Mr. Coffin; commencing with the 'Statement of the Honorable Abel Parker, Judge of Probate':

'As I was in the battle on Breed's Hill, on the 17th June, 1775, and there received one ball through my leg, another having passed through my clothes, all accounts of that battle are to me extremely interesting. But I had not seen an account which I considered in any degree correct, until the one published by General Dearborn. But notwithstanding the correctness of his description of the battle, some persons seem to be much exasperated by it, in particular as to what he asserts in regard to General Putnam. As long as they confined themselves to mere declamation, without bringing forward any evidence to disprove General Dearborn's statement, I deemed it unnecessary for me to appear in vindication of it. But, on perusing a letter from Colonel Trumbull to Colonel Putnam, (son of the general,) wherein mention is made of a conversation with Col. Small, in London, I concluded that to remain longer silent, would be absolutely criminal. I shall therefore, in as concise a manner as possible, state what I know relating to that memorable battle.'

It is not necessary to follow the Judge in the whole of his detail. He was attached to Captain John Nutting's company, in Prescott's regiment:

'The company,' he says, 'left the town, and marched to join the regiment on the hill. When we arrived there, the fort was in considerable forwardness, and the troops commenced throwing up the breast-work mentioned by General Dearborn. We had not been long in that work, before the cannon-shot from a hill in Boston, and the vessels lying in the river, were poured in upon us in great profusion. Some time before this there were brought to the fort several brass field-pieces, one of which was actually fired toward Boston, but the ball did not reach the town. In the time of this heavy fire, I, for the first time that day, saw General Putnam, standing with others, under cover of the north wall of the fort, where I believe he remained until the British troops made their appearance in their boats. At this time the artillery was withdrawn from the fort, by whose orders I know not, and General Putnam, at or near the same time, left the fort.

'When the British first made their attack with small arms, I was at the breast-work, where I remained until I received my wound from the party who flanked it; I then went to the fort, where I remained until the order to retreat was given by Colonel Prescott. After my arrival at the fort I had a perfect opportunity of viewing the operations of the day, and noticed Colonel P. as the only person who took upon him any command. He frequently ordered the men from one side to the other, in order to defend that part which was pressed hardest by the enemy; and I was within a few yards of him, when the order to retreat was given; and I affirm, that at that time *General Putnam* was not in the fort, neither had he been there at any time after my entering the same; and I have no hesitation in declaring, that the story told by Colonel Small to Colonel Trumbull, concerning General Putnam's saving him from the fire of our men at that time, is altogether unfounded.'

Colonel Trumbull, it appears, was completely hoaxed by this Colonel Small, of the British army, who induced him to alter the first draught of his picture of the battle, in order to give 'his friend,' as he called him, General Putnam, and himself conspicuous positions in the action; thereby rendering his picture, as an historical portrait, worthless, in fact offensive to the view, in exhibiting a representation contrary to what actually took place. The testimony of several others who were present and took part in the contest, is given in the pamphlet, fully confirming the statement of Judge Parker in regard to Colonel Small.

Rev. Dr. William Bentley, in his Statement published in Salem in 1818, says:

'I was with General Stark, on the 31st of May, 1810. Among the maps, prints, and papers I carried him, were some portraits, and among them was one of General Putnam. I recollect that, upon the sight of the head of General Putnam, he said, 'My *chaplain*,' as he called me, 'you know my opinion of that man. Had he done his duty, he would have decided the fate of his country in the first action.' He then proceeded to describe to me the scene of action, and told me where he saw General Putnam, and what was done on the occasion. His remarks were as severe as his genius and the sentiments of ardent patriotism could make them. As General Stark always used the same language on the subject, it will be recollected by many of his friends.'

The following are certificates of the Rev. Daniel Chaplin, D. D., of Groton, and the Rev. John Bullard, of Pepperell: 'This may certify to the public, that we whose names are here given, were in habits of intimacy with Colonel W. Prescott, of Pepperell, a man of the strictest integrity, during most of the period after he left the revolutionary army until his death.' Here they state his remarks respecting General Warren, of his refusing to take any command, etc., and add:

'Colonel Prescott further informed us repeatedly, that when a retreat was ordered and commenced, as he was descending the hill, he met with General Putnam, and said to him, 'Why did you not support me, General, with your men, as I had reason to expect, according to agreement?' Putnam answered, 'I could not *drive* the dogs up.' Prescott pointedly said to him, 'If you could not *drive* them up, you might have *led* them up.' We have good reason to believe further, from declarations of some of our parishioners, men of respectability, whose veracity cannot be doubted, who belonged to Colonel Prescott's regiment, and were present through the whole service, that General Putnam was not on Breed's Hill the night preceding, or on that day, except that just before the attack was made, he might have gone to the fort and ordered the tools to be carried off, that they might not fall into the hands of the enemy in the event of his carrying the works, and holding the ground, and that he and his men, with Colonel Gerrish, remained on the side of Bunker Hill toward the neck during the whole action.'

Thus it appears that General Putnam, at the battle of Bunker Hill, regardless of the lives of the brave men who fell on that glorious day, vindicating the cause of their country, was solely occupied in removing the camp equipage and brass field-pieces; taking away the very means that might have produced a different result to the contest.

How has it happened that the conduct of this man upon this occasion has not met with the universal reprobation of the country? His unbounded popularity on his entering the revolutionary army, is the reply. 'And,' says General Dearborn, 'no one can at this time offer any satisfactory reasons why he was held in such high estimation.'

Mankind are fond of the marvellous, and listen with intense avidity to relations of surprising acts of heroism and hair-breadth escapes. The country had been filled with the wonderful achievements of this hero in the French war, as detailed by himself, and afterward recorded by Colonel Humphreys; and his memorable victory over the she wolf, like the feats of the fabled Perseus, paved the way for the favorable reception of other acts equally valorous. Here is the solu-

tion of the mystery. General Putnam was looked upon as the Hercules of America, of unequalled prowess and skill in war. But the greatest boasters are not always the bravest in action; and this principle was tested at the battle of Bunker Hill.

In regard to the conduct of Colonel Gerrish, there is the greatest reason to believe that he was induced by Putnam to remain with his regiment, with him, as a *corps de reserve;* which, however, was not intended by the latter to be brought into action. And being under the protection, and perhaps as he thought under the command, of a Major-General, he presumed himself excusable for disobedience of the order of the commander-in-chief. 'The Colonel,' says General Wilkins, 'was cashiered, but the General, being distinguished for his popularity, served as third in command at the termination of the American revolution.' General Dearborn observes, that after this battle General Putnam was viewed in a very different light from what he had been before, and that 'the selection of the unfortunate Colonel Gerrish as a scape-goat was considered as a mysterious and inexplicable event.'

Now it appears to me that this difficulty admits of an easy explanation. General Putnam was not ordered to Bunker Hill; if he had been, he must have had the command as the superior officer. He was therefore not amenable for a dereliction of duty, none having been imposed upon him. He appears to have gone near the scene of action, with what view does not expressly appear, except that of securing the entrenching tools; although his biographers endeavor to place upon his brows the laurels nobly won by others. Mr. Sweet contradicts his own previous statement, when he says, 'General Putnam, having the general superintendence of the expedition, accompanied the troops.' He had before declared that Putnam sent a request to General Ward for a horse to ride to Bunker Hill, and of course without orders from that officer. There is no record in history, it is presumed, where a superior officer is ordered on an expedition as a mere *superintendent,* and the command at the same time given to an officer of inferior grade. What duty, in such case, devolves upon a superintendent? To take care of the camp equipage? Nonsense! The commander is the superintendent. The creation of this awkward office is entirely gratuitous; got up to account for General Putnam's being at or near the battle-ground, and as an apology for his looking on and taking no part in the action.

It is time the public should be disabused in respect to the character and services of General Putnam. Nearly all the accounts of the American revolutionary war, all encyclopedias and biographical works published in the United States, in treating of him, falsify history in the most shameful manner. As a sample, take the following from a late biography by the Rev. J. L. Blake, D. D. He says:

'Israel Putnam, Major-General in the American revolutionary war, was a native of Massachusetts. He settled in Connecticut, and early discovered that energy and decision of character which distinguished him through life; and the remarkable instance he gave of it in the destruction of a wolf will always go with his name. He was engaged in the French war, and a detail of his adventures and distresses border on romance. He was one of the first to take up arms at the

occurrence at Lexington, and performed a distinguished part at Bunker Hill. He had an important command during the whole war.'

Farther comment is unnecessary. The reader, from the proofs we have cited, must be convinced that the entire life of General Putnam, as given by his biographers, not only 'borders on,' but actually is, '*romance*.'

JOHN FELLOWS.

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